

# Survey Regarding High School Graduation Requirements & Graduation Ceremonies

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## About the Survey

The Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA) conducted a survey of approximately 260 high school principals April 1-3, 2020. These leaders were asked to respond to a two-question survey in a 48-hour time period.

The first question asked principals to choose from two options regarding requirements for high school graduation. The second question asked principals to share their ideas for a reimagined high school graduation under the current CDC guidelines and restrictions.

KASA's survey tool confirms that 260 leaders with the title of high school principal received the survey via their registered school email account. The survey tool also confirms that 25 percent or 65 of the 260 principals opened and completed the survey. The remaining 75 percent or 195 principals more than likely did not see the survey due to the short time window or email hidden in "other" or "junk" folders.

All geographical areas of the state and high school populations are represented in the survey data from the state's largest to the smallest district.

## Graduation Requirement Findings

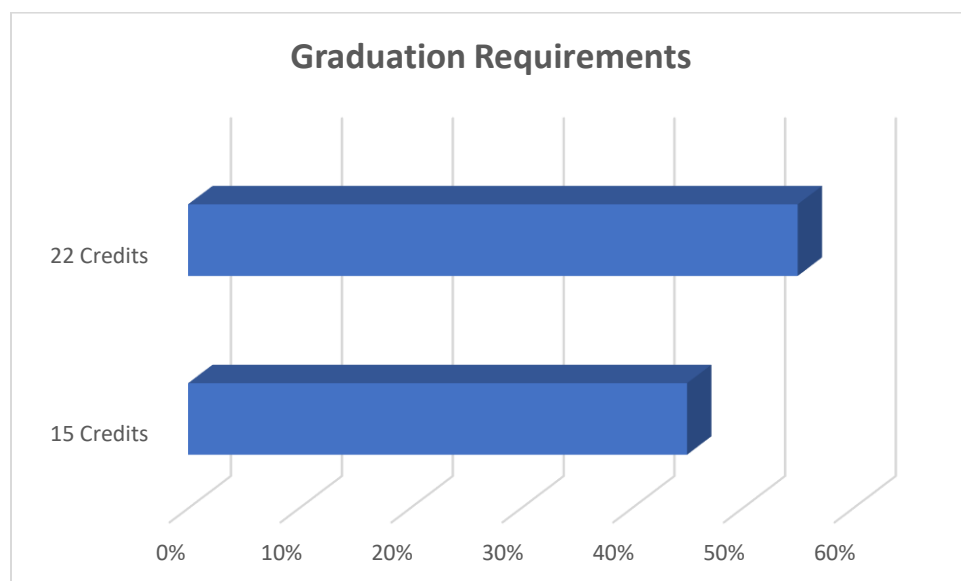
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Of the group, 65 leaders responded to the survey regarding high school graduation requirements. The following is an overview of the findings.

- 55% or 36 principals chose option 1 (22 credits)
- 45% or 29 principals chose option 2 (minimum 15 credits with no electives)

"This is a statistically close vote with a difference of only seven respondents choosing option 1 over option 2; however, I make the assumption that this would be a fair representation of the overall opinion of high school principals. If all were to vote, I suspect that the percentages would be roughly the same and adherence to the required minimum of 22 credits would be the preference."

*--Bob Bennett, High School Principal (Middlesboro Ind.)/KASA President-Elect*



Details about each option follow on page 2.

### **Option 1: 22 Credits**

55 percent of principals prefer option 1. This option does not require regulatory change but asks districts to waive additional requirements at the local level so students may graduate with a minimum number of 22 credits (with electives).

Ten respondents provided additional feedback through the comment section of the survey in support of this option. Comments are summarized.

- By this time seniors have completed multiple electives. Those who need credit are working toward completion of a required area or a career pathway. These are critical as many students are unable to meet ACT benchmarks.
- Electives allow for equity and respects students' work.
- Given three grading periods have been completed in this school year, NTI should be used to support a students' final grade. Flexibility at the local level is needed.

### **Option 2: 15 Credits**

45 percent of principals prefer option 2. This option requires KBE to waive the regulation and asks districts to waive additional requirements at the local level so students may graduate with a minimum number of 15 credits (without electives).

Eight respondents gave additional feedback through the comment section of the survey in support of this option. Comments are summarized.

- Under our current circumstances, option 2 is the most feasible.
- Many of our students are working extra hours at fast food restaurants as their parents have been laid off. Senioritis is also a factor and they have little interest in NTI.
- Can we justify denying graduation due to an incomplete elective when core courses are complete?
- By easing this restriction students will concentrate most on the courses that impact their ability to attend college. Students taking electives that impact their career pathway should continue and complete their certification.

## **Graduation Ceremony Findings**

The second survey question allowed for open-ended responses and asked high school principals to share their ideas for reimagining high school graduation under current CDC guidelines and restrictions.

Fifty principals of the 65 gave suggestions for hosting high school graduation ceremonies. A summary of their responses is listed:

1. Overall, a virtual graduation seems to be the ceremony of choice with 50% of respondents recommending this type ceremony.
2. Drive through ceremonies received the second highest number of votes with 17% responding.
3. A delayed ceremony date received strong consideration with 17% indicating it as an option.
4. A modified graduation while adhering to CDC guidelines was the fourth most popular option given.

### **Other Considerations**

It may be helpful if the Governor, Commissioner, and KDE prepared an acceptable practices documents for districts and high schools to follow for graduation ceremonies. This is pending the concern for the potential spread of COVID-19 remaining through the summer.

It may also be worth noting that without guidance from the Department, districts and high schools may endanger their students and communities though they are only trying to do what they believe is best with no intention of harm. Based on the responses, the implication that some will assemble even though the window of concern for the spread of the virus has not yet closed.

Compiled list of suggested ceremony types and number of respondents recommending:

- Virtual ceremony (24)
- Drive through ceremony (8)
- Delay with concerns (8)
- Modified crowd size in person (6)
- Parking lot ceremony with students/families remaining in cars with drive through diploma and picture (1)
- Car parade (1)
- Request for directive from KDE (1)
- No ceremony and mail diplomas (1)

## Final Conclusions

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Given the uniqueness of Kentucky's high schools, the findings from this survey are not surprising.

If a single option is required for high school graduation, it is most likely that Option 1 as presented (requiring a minimum number of 22 credits to graduate) would receive the most support.

While the graduation ceremony data provides several suggestions, it is clear there is no easy answer as a student's high school graduation is a significant milestone to mark completion of one's high school career and entry into the adult world. Except for one respondent principals agree a ceremony of some type is needed.

When considering the vast differences and resources among Kentucky's high schools, "flexibility" is key to meeting the needs of each individual student we serve.